

702 h3

A
L E T T E R
T O
D R. B E L L.

Price ONE SHILLING.

LETTER

TO

DR. B. F. L.

THE CHURCH

Gal 10 Mc
1.

A

L E T T E R
TO THE
REV. WILLIAM BELL, D.D.
PREBENDARY OF ST. PETER'S WESTMINSTER,
On the Subject of his late Publications upon the
AUTHORITY, NATURE, AND DESIGN
OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.
BY LEWIS BAGOT, LL.D.
DEAN OF CHRIST-CHURCH.

OXFORD:

Printed for J. and J. FLETCHER, in the Turl;
And sold by Messrs. RIVINGTON, in St. Paul's
Church-yard, London.

M DCC LXXX I.

16

IMPRIMATUR,

S. DENNIS,

VICE-CAN. OXON.

Martii 4. 1781.



In the Press, and speedily will be Published,

The DOCTRINE of the SACRAMENTS,

**By ISAAC BARROW, D.D. late Master of Trinity
College, Cambridge.**

Printed for J. and J. Fletcher, in the Turle; and
sold by Messrs. Rivington, in St. Paul's Church-
yard, London.

Where may be had,

**TWELVE DISCOURSES on the PROPHECIES, con-
cerning the first Establishment and subsequent
History of Christianity. Preached in Lincoln's
Inn Chapel, at the Lecture of the Right, Re-
verend William Warburton, late Lord Bishop
of Gloucester. By LEWIS BAGOT, LL. D.
Dean of Christ-Church.**

THE HISTORY OF THE

By James H. ...

London: ...

Printed for ...

By ...

and ...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

...

S I R,

YOUR estimation in the World will of course give a certain degree of credit to every thing you publish. The generality of readers will be little disposed to suspect either your intentions or your prudence. It becomes on this account the more necessary, that whatever proceeds from your Pen should by some one or other be scrupulously examined. As a learned Man, you must wish your opinions to abide this trial: and in Religious Matters, a

A

Man

Man of serious Principles ought not to attempt imposing any opinions on the Faith and Conscience of the unlearned, which have not been thus cleared from all possibility of mistake.

IN this Country there is an established Faith, and an established Worship adapted to it, both of approved excellence, framed by men of as distinguished Wisdom and as distinguished Piety as ever lived upon earth ; framed with the strictest regard to Scripture truth, and calculated to promote the great purposes of Christianity among all Ranks of Men. Such an establishment hath a claim to some deference and respect from her own Sons at least, from those especially who are engaged in her service

vice by the most solemn Professions, who
 “ LIVE OF THE SACRIFICE, AND EAT
 “ OF THE MILK OF THE FLOCK.”—
 “ Truth however, you will say, must not
 “ yield to Authority, and a good Chris-
 “ tian ought not to stand by and see the
 “ unlearned misled in essential matters
 “ without apprizing him of his dan-
 “ ger.”—In this position we are per-
 fectly agreed: in the application of it
 we shall be found to differ very widely.

OUR Blessed Lord hath enjoined two
 solemn and significant Rites for perpe-
 tual observance in his Church. To un-
 derstand these aright, and conscien-
 tiously to practice them in perfect a-
 greement with the intention of their
 great Author, must be an object of the

utmost consequence to every individual Christian, whatever his rank or attainments may be.

THE Church of England, in her Catechism, in her Articles of Faith, and in an appropriated service for the celebration of each of these Rites, hath given a clear, and decided opinion concerning the authority, nature, and design of both of them.

Not many months ago, Sir, you published a learned Treatise, which, with becoming modesty, you stiled, "*An Attempt to ascertain and illustrate the Authority, Nature, and Design of the Institution of Christ, commonly*

“ monly called the Communion and
 “ the Lord’s Supper.”

You must have conceived, when you undertook this work, either that you had something new and important to offer on the Subject, or at least that you could state what others before you had maintained, in a more striking manner than they had done, and so as materially to serve the cause of Truth, which I am satisfied was your original intention. The fact is, neither your principles nor arguments are new; they have been uniformly adopted by all Socinian writers on the subject; they have been adopted by Bishop Hoadly; and last of all by your late learned friend Bishop Pearce.

It

IT is true likewise, that these principles, by whomsoever adopted, are themselves utterly inconsistent with the Public Doctrines and Service of the established Church.

THE first Question is, where the Truth probably lies?—If it is clearly with you, the Church should acknowledge her Errors, and alter her Forms. Then, and not till then, might your last Tract, entitled, “ A Practical Enquiry,” be put with propriety into the hands of him for whose instruction it is designed, “ the unlearned Believer.” Before that step is taken, it

* See the Title Page of the “ Practical Enquiry.”

can answer no other end than that of perplexing his conscience, and unsettling every religious principle by which he hath hitherto conducted himself.

What can the poor man think, or how can he act, with his Common Prayer Book in one hand, for which he hath all his life entertained a just veneration; and in the other, Dr. Bell's "Practical Enquiry," which assures him, that his Prayer Book hath hitherto *deceived him*, and led him *to pervert* the most solemn Institution of his Saviour^b?

SURELY it is a very serious matter to trifle thus with the Consciences of Men; and can only tend to weaken that influence of Religious Principle,

^b See "Practical Enquiry, Qu. XXXVII.

which

which still operates among us, though God knows with less power and to less extent than might be wished.

Y o u tell the *unlearned Believer*, that he must take your opinions *upon Trust*; there is, you say, *an absolute necessity* for it*. — Pardon me, Sir, I know of no such necessity, with respect to the private opinions of any man. If the unlearned wanted instruction on this Subject, he would naturally apply to the Minister of his Parish; and that Minister, on such application, ought to refer him to his Catechism and to the Church Service, as most competent to determine his judgement where he

* See "Practical Enquiry," p. 19. Note 5.

had not the means of examining for himself.

You have indeed, you say, “ *com-
pletely demonstrated* the Truth of your
“ opinions ; but such discussions are of
“ too difficult and abstruse a nature for
“ the great Body of Christians^d. ” —
But hath this Demonstration, so com-
plete and satisfactory to your own mind,
produced conviction in the mind of
every learned Christian who hath dili-
gently and fairly considered it? No,
Sir, it hath not : perhaps not in a sin-
gle instance where Socinianism, or the
principles of Hoadly, or a fashionable
disposition to degrade the Doctrines of
the Gospel, had not already prepared

^d Practical Enquiry, Pref. p. ii.

the way for you.—On these grounds, indeed, your Scheme will have many advocates ; many whose concurrence you will not, I trust, consider as adding any great weight to your cause.

You will say that you are justified in concluding, that your arguments have convinced the Learned, because they have not answered them.—It is true, no formal reply hath appeared to your first Treatise. But is there no other reason to be assigned for this, except that it was unanswerable ?

THE topic you have undertaken to decide upon for yourself, and, a little hastily, for others too, is a very serious one indeed, and of general concern. —

A public

A public Controversy on such a topic, in these days, was not to be wished, and was therefore prudently declined. Your opinions were, till lately, only in the hands of the learned who could examine for themselves, and were certainly under no *necessity of taking them upon Trust*. As long as this was the case, mischief of the most extensive sort could not be done.

YOUR arguments, however, have not passed wholly unnoticed. Some objections have been incidentally made to them, and such as, till they are answered, must affect the Truth of the greatest part of your Book.—This circumstance I should not have been disposed to bring forward, had you not in your “ Practi-

“cal Enquiry” just published, pronounced your Demonstration to be absolutely complete, and thence assumed an unwarranted authority, in opposition to the Church you are a Member of, to dictate to the Faith and Conscience of *unlearned Believers*. — Dr. Ogden’s Sermons on the Subject, though written long before, have been published since your Book appeared. — The learned Editor of them, therefore, was certainly not convinced by your arguments. — I have, moreover, particular reason to believe, that learned friends of your own had communicated their exceptions both against your arguments and the general tendency of your Doctrine, even before they were submitted to the public. — Your opinion, then,

is

is as yet only the opinion of a private Man; and in the judgement of many able and learned Divines of the present age, just as inconsistent with Scripture, as it is with the Communion Service and Catechism of the Church; and by no means conducive to the furtherance of Christian piety. The Divines of the last century, as able writers, as fair and diligent enquirers as ever stood forward in support of Evangelical Truths, have many of them discussed the Subject, and are to a Man against you. I could go farther back a great deal, as far as to the first Preachers of the Gospel. There have, indeed, been debates in all times concerning the Christian Sacraments, but all Churches have agreed in considering

ing them as appointed means of conveying certain and substantial benefits in the use of them. So that your business is not so completely done as you flattered yourself. — You will understand I do not appeal to these men on account of the high authority of their names only ; I appeal to them with the Scripture in their hands — there they rest their opinions ; and are much fuller in their references to it, and investigation of its sense, than you have been.

It is no great recommendation of your Doctrine, that it is the favourite system of those Heretics who utterly explode the other Christian Sacrament. I do not apprehend you mean in that respect

respect to join issue with them.—
 But if you will try to explain that
 Sacrament on the same principles you
 have explained the Lord's Supper, you
 will find yourself in the end at no
 great distance from them: you may
 retain the Form perhaps, but must give
 up the Substance—the real significancy
 and benefit of it.

ENOUGH, it appears, hath been
 written long ago to obviate all you
 have said on the subject—enough to
 show that the plain sense of the Words
 of the Institution itself, and of every
 passage relating to it in the Apostolic
 Writings, holds forth an intelligible
 Doctrine very different from what you
 have adopted. — These Writings are at
 hand—This being the case, it could
 answer

answer no good end to begin the controversy anew. Your argumentative work therefore, the "*complete edition*," as you call it, of your Enquiry, may well be left to stand or fall by its own strength. — But your "*Practical Enquiry*" calls for Notice, and *the Unlearned Believer*, on whom it is imposed, ought to be warned of the danger of it. It is yet in your power, and I am convinced it is your Duty, to suppress it yourself.—The Religious peace and comfort of thousands may be affected by it.

I KNOW how unfashionable the principles are on which I have proceeded in this Address; and how large a party

* See "*Practical Enquiry*," Note 2, p. 19.

of various denominations, and induced by various motives, will be ready to espouse your cause.—With such I do not concern myself. My address is to you; and to you as a Minister of the Established Church, called upon to officiate in every part of her Service, to avow her Articles of Faith, and inculcate such Doctrines only, especially on the unlearned, as are consistent with them.

THE seriousness and sincerity of your intentions I should be very backward to call in question. There is, however, in your “Practical Enquiry,” one assertion which I own startled me.

IN the Note, p. 19. speaking of one passage in St. Paul’s first Epistle to the

C

Corin-

Corinthians, and another in St. John's Gospel, as having been supposed by some to relate to the Lord's Supper, you intimate that such supposition is ill founded, and proceed to say, " This is " proved at large in the Appendix and " Notes to the Complete Edition of " this Enquiry." What must the unlearned Believer think of the necessity he is under to take all you say upon trust, when he is told, that of the passage in St. John's Gospel, not a single word is said in the Appendix or Notes, or any where else, in that Complete Edition of your Enquiry: and moreover, that very soon after the appearance of the Work, you were expressly admonished of that very omission.— This is indeed Enigmatical, and requires
to

to be accounted for. Overights in all human productions have a claim to some allowance : but on no occasion so little, as where an Authority is assumed on pretence of superior information, to dictate preremptorily to the Faith and Conduct of the Ignorant.

THIS earnest Address, resulting from a sense of Duty, a regard to the Truth, a serious attachment to our Religious Establishment in all its parts, and an hearty zeal for the peace and welfare of every honest Christian, is submitted to your own most attentive consideration : and it is submitted in this public manner, that it may at the same time draw the attention of those on your Conduct, who, from their station and repute both for learning and piety, may fairly be presumed

sumed to have the most weight with a
Man of Modesty and Candour,

It is not my intention, in what I
have said, either to compliment or of-
fend you. To wish to offend you I
can have no inducement. Compliment
on such occasion hath no place.

I am, Sir, with all due esteem for

Your Talents and Character,

Your faithful Servant,

Ch. Ch.

March 4.

1781.

L. BAGOT,

